

An appreciation of the life of Paula Claire Schuman (1948-2010)

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Paula Schuman, a former member of the Workers League (forerunner to the Socialist Equality Party) and specialist in infectious diseases and AIDS, died on January 10, 2010 at her home in Davenport, Iowa at the age of 61.

Paula was born and raised in the city of Detroit, where her family was active in the labor and civil rights movement. At a very young age, Paula became sympathetic to the struggles of the working class and opposed all forms of discrimination and oppression in capitalist society.

Like many of her generation, Paula opposed the Vietnam War and the attacks that were being made on the American working class to finance the relentless bombing and slaughter of thousands of workers and peasants in Asia.

While attending Georgetown University as a medical student, Paula met the Workers League and, after discussing the socialist and internationalist perspective of the Trotskyist movement, made a decision to join.

When she completed her residency at Johns Hopkins, Paula moved back to the city of Detroit and played a very active role fighting for the party's perspective. Hundreds of autoworkers purchased copies of the party's weekly *Bulletin* newspaper from her outside factory gates.

While working as a doctor at Herman Kiefer Medical Center, Paula was the main organizer in the fight for a physicians' union, which eventually won recognition in 1988.

While Paula withdrew from political activity in the party during the period of the 1980s, she remained sympathetic to its perspective and supported its

activities.

When an outbreak of the deadly AIDS virus took place during this same period, Paula threw her efforts as a physician into combating the disease, which was taking a particularly heavy toll on those who lacked access to health insurance and medical care.

In an interview with the *Detroit News* in 1992 highlighting her work, Paula commented, "I don't think anybody wants to be a specialist in AIDS, this is not a fun thing to do. There are a lot of diseases we can cure. None of us went into medicine to deal with a disease, which kills everyone. But it has to be done."

By this time a mother with four young children, Paula worked 10 to 11 hours a day operating a clinic at the Detroit Medical Center near downtown Detroit and treated hundreds of women, some with insurance and many without, afflicted with AIDS.

Paula's role was not only that of a medical doctor, but a counselor, friend and confidant for the most impoverished and underprivileged sections of society. Many patients were directed to Paula's clinic after being shuffled from hospital to hospital because they lacked health insurance.

In addition to treating patients, Paula fought against cuts in social services that compounded problems facing the poor. Many patients would contact her about the problems they were having in paying their rent and heating bills. While busy with her family and work, she took the time to listen to and assist patients.

Paula actively fought for a federal grant to further AIDS research and probe why, for example, women died from the disease faster than men. She became an AIDS specialist with a national reputation, conducting research both in the United States and Africa.

Commenting on her dedication in the *Detroit News* article, Paula explained, "It fits in with my social

outlook. Infectious disease specialists take on typhoid fever or go to Africa and fight river blindness. This is a disease of the most socially deprived people throughout the world. The incredible pathos of this thing grabbed me.”

The pioneering work done by Paula in the field of AIDS research was an extremely important medical contribution. A number of colleagues, who spoke very passionately of her work at the memorial service, commented on her tireless and inexhaustible level of dedication in searching for answers.

Paula is survived by her former husband Jacques Vielot; her three daughters Miranda, Nadja and Jacqueline; and two children she adopted while working in Africa, Cathy and Emmanuel. Paula’s son Dmitri died in 1999.



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